

Xavier University

## Exhibit

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Xavier University Student, Faculty, Staff, and  
Alum Activism

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## Dear Xavier, Love Alumni: Call to Action in Anti-Racism Movement Letter

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Dear Xavier University representative or affiliate:

All summer long, the fight against racism has been yet again thrust into the national spotlight. Now is the time for unapologetic courage in anti-racism action. The alumni of Xavier University are calling Xavier University leadership to rise up and respond. We are providing this letter in advance of the university's Day of READ (Reflection, Education, Awareness, Discernment), with the hopes that you will ruminate on the reflections of alumni and enrich your own discernment as a result.

We, Xavier University alumni, support current student efforts in the fight against racism and acknowledge the current efforts at Xavier University, such as listed by Father Graham in [his letter on June 1, 2020](#); however, we believe the university can do more to ensure its Black students, faculty, and staff are safe, welcomed, and celebrated at Xavier University and beyond. Xavier University claims to be a pillar of equitable education and a warrior for justice, but it is not apparent to us that this is unequivocally true.

We, Xavier University Alumni, present our reflections on several Jesuit pillars. For Xavier University to be committed to these Jesuit values which it claims as its core identity, university leadership must reflect honestly on if they actually practice what they preach. We want to be proud of our alma mater and will not tolerate mere performative activism. These reflections are a culmination of an outreach effort conducted in July of 2020.

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### **Reflection**

We call upon Xavier University leadership to reflect on the university's history and previous responses (or lack thereof) to racism in order to inform future responses and actions. As alumni, we have witnessed previous racial bias incidents disappear and be swept under the rug as mere PR scandals for the university to overcome, rather than be addressed as the gross grievances they were. In multiple incidents, including those that occurred in 2016, there was no significant action taken against students who contributed to racial bias. As students, we were led to believe the involved parties in said racist actions received the proper ramifications and anti-racist education, only to discover that minimal, if any, action was taken against those guilty parties. There can be no misunderstanding or miscommunication in these matters.

Such actions committed by Xavier University create a mirage for the community, seeming to deal with bias and racism adequately, yet fail to take the necessary steps to ensure Black students are appropriately protected against those who willingly and passively harm them.

Consistently the University has failed to demonstrate a stance of anti-racism in a way that effectively helps Black students feel safe, known, and welcome.

Reactively, Xavier University sends email after email, hosts forum after forum, but to no avail because there is often little actionable follow-up. It is the duty of Xavier University's leadership to reflect on the pain and damage these performative measures inflict on its Black students, and the steps backwards it takes in the fight against racism as a result. **We urge Xavier University leadership to reflect on its past actions and develop more stringent processes that hold students, staff, and faculty accountable for racist acts.** In these processes, we demand that Xavier University be transparent within the Xavier community and with the Cincinnati community at large.

### **Discernment**

Intentional reflection can lead to proactive discernment. We urge Xavier University leadership to discern its role within the fight against racism. We hope for the sake of the university and for justice, that leadership will unanimously agree that its place is at the forefront in the fight for racial justice.

Empathetic listening to the voices of Black students, staff, and faculty and following up with proper inclusion fails to fully embody the solidarity and kinship value. We urge Xavier University leadership to reflect on how its current practices do not significantly reflect a belief of solidarity and kinship, and implement new practices that recruit, retain, and care for non-white members appropriate, aggressive actions can lead to a Xavier University where its Black community thrives. **The university must actively listen to the prophetic voices of these students and act with an urgency and fervor knowing that the future of Xavier University depends on it.** The Black community's feedback, in addition to leadership's own initiative of learning, can foster the creation and implementation of policies and procedures that will protect, support, and recruit Black students, faculty, and staff.

### **Solidarity & Kinship**

We implore Father Graham, his successor, and all Xavier University leaders to acknowledge how Xavier University has contributed and continues to contribute to racism within its own community. Explicit messages of separation and failure to adequately participate in the Norwood and Evanston neighborhoods have robbed Xavier of a unique opportunity to fully stand in solidarity and kinship with those in their own backyard.

For example, the construction of fences around the outdoor basketball courts, failure to adequately address the racist history of the titular inspiration behind Bishop Fenwick Hall, and the misguided financial decisions (from accepting Koch Brothers donations to outsourcing the

dining staffing to Chartwells) all prohibit the proper demonstration of solidarity and kinship and contribute to the popular euphemism of the “Xavier Bubble.” For solidarity and kinship to be tangibly realized on campus, Xavier University needs to acknowledge its racist history and repair its community ties so that it can better the community and world within which it resides. As one alumni reflected, “it does not help graduates become “men and women for others” in the workforce if [those graduates] are devoid of interaction and deep understanding of the injustices that surround those in the immediate Xavier community, let alone those systemically.”

Furthermore, there is a dire need to see more representation and shared power across campus. From the student body all the way to the board of trustees, the lack of representation and of the community. Building on the values of reflection and discernment, Xavier University needs to stand up against those injustices that are still occurring in a space that we, alumni, take pride in - **and in which we donate.**

### ***Cura Personalis***

The Jesuit value of *cura personalis* calls us to care for the whole person. Currently, it is evident that this is not happening specifically for Black students, faculty, and staff on campus. Taking an anti-racist stance in policies, procedures, hiring, and responses to moments that violate the safety and legitimacy of Black students must happen to fully realize the value of *cura personalis*. Aside from being tuition-paying students and donating alumni, Black students should be recognized as respected, cherished individuals on campus.

Xavier University must provide distinct, restorative healing spaces for its Black students, staff, and faculty, as they frequently experience racial bias and racist incidents, as made evident by recent grassroots efforts such as the Instagram account @blackatxavier. The Center for Diversity and Inclusion cannot be one of the only safe spaces on campus for Black students. Students from Xavier University can not be expected to “go forth and set the world on fire,” when they are deeply wounded by the racist experiences on campus and improperly cared for by the very place which promised to equip them with tools to light the torches necessary to change the world.

### ***Magis***

*Magis*, or “the more universal good,” implores us to find ways to continually better ourselves and the university so we can make our community and world better. The speech and sentiment of this value are made in vain if students fail to be transformed through the courses and experiences curated to promote a lifelong commitment to *magis*. Ideally, students will be better, stronger, more justice-focused individuals when they leave Xavier. If this is to be so,

they cannot be short-changed by a lackluster miseducation from Xavier University on racism and racial justice.

Practically, alumni suggested the consideration of a mandatory class or curriculum that explores racism and the racist history of the United States. The current passive approach, namely GOA's two-session curriculum, is ineffective in properly challenging students to think critically about this topic. Curriculum, such as the kind described above, would afford every student from every college the benefit to learn and reflect on the impact of structural and institutional racism. We want to create a community of leaders that can adequately respond to, fight against, and expose strategically hidden racism.

We understand that this is a process of continual reflection and discernment, but we know that this attempt is crucial to supporting our Black students, staff, and faculty. We ask for the university leadership to ceaselessly strive for *magis* and the consequent betterment of its community.

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To reiterate, Xavier Alumni stand in solidarity with current students, staff, and faculty efforts to dismantle racism on campus. We implore the university leadership to listen and adequately respond to all demands made by the student body - they are not screaming into a vacuum, and we stand here to bolster their demands.

It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge that if there were not already dedicated, justice-seeking individuals at Xavier University, the energy behind this letter may never have been honed into a collective action. For those pockets of sanctuary at Xavier University and the staff and faculty working tirelessly to fight against racism on Xavier's campus - this letter is a testimony to your hard work and the impact you have made on our lives. We are so grateful for your efforts. **Now, we call upon Xavier University's leadership to make those spaces and people the status quo and requirement for the rest of campus.**

By the time this letter reaches your inbox, it will be September. Five months since the murder of Breonna Taylor. Four months since the murder of George Floyd. Countless more months and countless more names. In this time, what direct action has Xavier University taken to protect Black students, staff, faculty, and community members? Posting one black square on social media and publishing one endearing letter from Father Graham are simply not enough.

We are encouraged by the open forum to discuss the renaming of Bishop Fenwick Hall to be held on the Day of READ after the Spirit Celebration, but we implore the university to ensure

action doesn't stop once the forum is over. **Eloquence does not equate action.** Allocate more funds and give unconditional support to Xavier University's Black students, staff, and faculty - or risk losing alumni money and support. Xavier University cannot sit this fight out and remain relevant.

This momentum is here to stay.

All for one,

### **Organizers**

Haley (Beavers) Khoury , Class of 2017

Hannah Sheppard, Class of 2017

Rayanne Pancoast, Class of 2017

### **Organizing Committee**

Rhandi Wallace, Class of 2018

Jeremiah Pennebaker, Class of 2017

Aichetou Bintou Waiga, Class of 2017

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Emily Hogan	2017
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Paula van der Sluys	2018
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